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SUBMISSION
to the
ROYAL COMMISSION ON COAL (1959)
by
DISTRICT 26
UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA.

SUBMISSION
to the
ROYAL COMMISSION ON COAL (1959)
(New Brunswick hearings)

by
DISTRICT 26
UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA

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March 2-3, 1960.
Fredericton, N.B.

THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE IAN G. RAY
COMMISSIONER
ROYAL COMMISSION ON COAL (1977)

Honourable Sir:

District 24, United Mine Workers of America, are most gratified for this opportunity of presenting our views on the New Brunswick coal industry. We are pleased that the Government has deemed the coal industry sufficiently important to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate the problems that are besetting the industry in both Eastern and Western Canada. We are particularly pleased with your appointment to this important task and we feel certain that some solution to the long range Canadian coal production and marketing problems will emanate from your investigation.

We wish to indicate to you that this submission to the Royal Commission will be rather abbreviated because at the time of the writing of this report the findings of the Royal Commission on the New Brunswick Coal Mining Industry were not available to the United Mine Workers of America. We do, however, wish to emphasize that when the recommendations of this Commission become public that we may anticipate this being either a written or oral submission at a later date. Coal production in this Province was 985,881 tons in 1977. The New Brunswick Power Commission consumed 161,416 tons of this production in 1977. This is a large scale single market which the New Brunswick coal industry could fill.

afford to lose. It has been indicated that the future generation of electricity would consume huge amounts of foreign oil instead of natively produced coal which is returning a substantial income to a large and important segment of the population of New Brunswick.

The coal mining industry in this Province is now providing an income of approximately Ten Million Dollars a year to the people of New Brunswick. We firmly believe that an industry of this size should not be allowed to deteriorate to any extent, but should be given every advantage possible to enhance the prosperity of the people of the Maritime Provinces in general, and the Province of New Brunswick in particular.

During the last ten years, coal production has almost doubled in this Province -- for instance, the total production in 1948 was 519,599 tons, and in 1959 the production reached a total of 993,821 tons. This has been the most significant percentage-wise increase in any coal producing province in Canada, and furthermore the profits derived from this production are most lucrative.

The coal mining industry in this Province is plagued by a relatively low wage rate and by that we mean low in relation to the wages paid in other coal mining provinces in the Dominion of Canada. Productivity is fair in the shaft mines and good in the strip mining operations, but wages paid to the employees continue to be on a sub-standard level.

Another disturbing factor that affects all the citizens of the Province is the shameful condition in which the worked-out areas are left by the dragline operators. Hundreds of acres are pockmarked with deep craters and mountains of rock and shale. These pits gradually became filled with stagnant water which have claimed the lives of at least three children in the last couple of years. We have information that the strip mining operators in the United States pay approximately Ten Cents (10¢) per ton to rehabilitate the land. District 26, United Mine Workers of America, have pleaded with the present Government and the previous government to enact legislation to compel dragline operators to undertake a program of reconversion of the land that has been left ruined, and we fully expect that this will be one of the pertinent points recommended by this Commission.

Another matter which is causing considerable concern to the United Mine Workers of America is the amount of unemployment that exists during the warmer months of the year in the mining area of Minto, New Brunswick. Many mine workers are only working three or four days per week, while some operators are compelling their men to work seven days per week. This practice of forcing men to work on the Sabbath must be ended by Government action and we fully trust that this will be one of the recommendations of this Commission. This would serve the two-fold purpose of providing more employment for every mineworker in the Province, as well as giving each worker the God-given right that he will enjoy at least one day a week away from his labour.

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METHODS OF MINING

Coal mining operations in this Province are carried on by both shaft and stripping methods. Approximately 75% of the coal is extracted by the open pit operations, while the remainder of the production is mined by the shaft or slope method. At the present time, there are nine stripping operations and five shaft mines in the Minto district. During the past decade, coal production in New Brunswick has increased tremendously with a resulting benefit to the people of the Province. This increase has been due to a large degree by increased activity in the strip mines, but this Union is firm in its belief that future coal operations in New Brunswick depend on increased production from the shaft or slope collieries. Strip coal mining can only be continued until the overburden becomes so heavy that it becomes uneconomical to mine the coal by this method. It then becomes necessary to conduct underground operations to extract the available coal. We, therefore, strongly recommend to this Commission that special emphasis be placed on the most advantageous mining methods and the proper preparation of the coal extracted.

It is the opinion of the United Mine Workers of America that an extensive program of mechanization is necessary to adequately increase the productivity in the New Brunswick shaft mines. While some research has already been undertaken in this direction, suitable machinery has not yet been installed to increase the low per-man-day output that now prevails in the underground seams of the Minto coal field.

The present method of shaft mining in New Brunswick consists of shooting the coal out of the solid coal face. This procedure, while not only being expensive and relatively non-productive, is a menace to the health of the mine workers involved in the operation. We, therefore, suggest that one of the prime recommendations of this Commission would be a further investigation to locate suitable mechanized equipment which would increase productivity in the shaft operations of New Brunswick.

While increased productivity in shaft mining is of vital importance to the future of the coal industry in New Brunswick, there still remains the problem of disposing of the tonnage produced. Domestic and industrial consumers of coal are becoming ever more quality-conscious of the fuel they buy. We, therefore, deem it imperative that a proper coal washing plant be located in the Minto area to assure that the coal will be of a quality to satisfy those who use it. We realize that our suggestions involve an expenditure of considerable sums of money, but it is only in this manner that productivity can be increased and a suitable product put on the market. The Maritime Coal Assistance Act is designed to aid coal producers who desire to mechanize and modernize their operations and we feel that a coal washery could be erected in a central location by co-operation among the various operators and yet not destroy competition within the industry.

MARKETS FOR NEW BRUNSWICK COAL

The New Brunswick Electric Power Commission is one of the chief outlets for Minto coal. For instance, consumption of coal by the Power Commission has increased from 103,773 tons in 1947 to 161,416 tons in 1959, and the estimated demand by the Power Commission projected into 1964 is 357,500 tons providing that oil does not make inroads into this market for coal by that time.

Although this is a steady market and very vital to the coal industry in this Province, it is complicated by a system of penalty clauses depending on the quality of the coal. Earlier in this submission we have suggested that the coal operators must face the fact that an extensive mechanization program should be undertaken in the near future and that Minto coal be washed and otherwise properly prepared. We are sincere in our belief that a program of this kind must now be quite apparent to the coal operators in this Province if the industry is going to be competitive with other fuels. With this thought in mind, we are of the opinion that this Commission should recommend that penalty clauses should be deleted from the purchasing policy of the N.B.E.P.C. until the operators begin a program of mechanization and modernization. After that they will be unnecessary anyway.

In past years, most of the coal produced in New Brunswick was consumed within the Province, but gradually a market has been developed in the Province of Quebec. The whole

eastern coal industry -- not only here, but in Nova Scotia -- must make every effort to put a very well prepared product into this market. This becomes increasingly important as the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Trans Canada Natural Gas Pipeline progress toward completion. Energy consumers in Quebec and elsewhere are going to demand a clean and economic commodity to produce their power requirements. In a short period of time they will have a choice of natural gas, hydro electric power, imported oil, or imported or native coals. It may seem that this brief is over-emphasizing the importance of a high quality coal for the Maritime Provinces, but trends indicate that unless our coal is made available to these Quebec consumers, at a competitive price and quality, that we may possibly lose a golden opportunity to further develop this important market. That is why we stress that an immediate investment of substantial amounts of money to mechanize and modernize the New Brunswick coal industry is imperative to at least maintain, and possibly expand, this basic natural resource, and we trust that this will be the most important recommendation of this Commission.

While the markets for New Brunswick coal are limited, to a certain extent, to the Province of New Brunswick, Quebec, and the New England States of the United States of America, we are of the opinion that market requirements could be increased in the State of Maine, U.S.A. The pulp and paper industry along the Eastern Seaboard is sufficiently large to

absorb additional tonnages of New Brunswick coal. We admit that the Federal Government is reluctant to subsidize any native product for export, but we are of the opinion that this Commission should closely study the possibility of enlarging the market for New Brunswick coal in the New England States and recommend to the Federal Government through the Dominion Coal Board that every assistance be given to market New Brunswick coal in the New England States of the United States of America.

While on the subject of markets for New Brunswick coal, we feel we should make reference to the substantial amounts of oil used in Government buildings in this Province. It must be kept in mind that all of the oil consumed here is an important product used in direct competition to New Brunswick coal. It is our opinion that preferential treatment should be directed toward the coal industry to supply the requirements of Government purchases of fuel used in Government buildings and installations. A policy of this nature would set an example for other fuel consumers in the province and possibly induce them to favor the use of New Brunswick mined coal rather than foreign oil, and we feel that this should be another recommendation of this Commission.

The preliminary estimates of coal reserves, as provided to the Union by the New Brunswick Royal Commission on Coal are greatly appreciated and while the information supplied is accurate to some extent - much of it is based on assumption.

The terms of reference of this Commission (Royal Commission on New Brunswick Coal Industry) are inter-related in that any interested groups are invited to submit proposals as to the desirable level of annual output for the coal industry of New Brunswick, and the probable trends in the total cost per ton that may be experienced in the years to come. The desirable output would be one that would dispose of as much coal as possible in any year -- providing that the workers, the employers, and the consumers all received a just share of any profits that may be forthcoming. This, of course, depends on what the attitude of the coal operators would be in relation to a rapid and advanced program of mechanization and modernization.

There are approximately 7500 people in the Minto area, and their sole means of support depends on continued coal operations. It has been estimated (Dominion Bureau Statistics) that there are 4.7 members per family in this Province which places the direct source of livelihood of about 35,250 people on the New Brunswick coal industry. An industry of this size is very important to the Provincial economy and with proper direction we feel it could make a substantial contribution to the future economic life of this Province.

It has been stated earlier in this brief that wage rates are relatively low in New Brunswick despite the fact that the profit per ton of coal mined is relatively high. A satisfied and stabilized working force can only be attained in an industry where wages are good and working conditions are

favourable. This situation does not obtain in most of the coal operations of New Brunswick. The cost of living and the standard of living are similar in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, but a coal miner in this Province works for considerably less money than his counterpart receives in Nova Scotia. It seems reasonable to expect that many mine workers will gravitate to other industries when the opportunity arises to improve their standard of living. The coal operators must pay sufficient wages to maintain an efficient labor force, or be confronted with a high percentage of labor turn-over which is both costly to the operation and does not tend to keep experienced men in the coal industry.

Working conditions in the coal industry are not satisfactory in this Province. The inferred coal reserves are most self-explanatory because of the destitute condition in which strip operators leave their workings and move to more lucrative areas. Their coal cuts are allowed to fill with water and forever prevent the recovery of coal that might have been gained by shaft or slope mining. The present method of shaft mining that now prevails in this Province has been referred to earlier, but we must reiterate that some adequate method of proper ventilation must be recommended by this Commission. The high percentage of explosive powder used to blow the coal out of the solid face, combined with poor ventilation, certainly is detrimental to the health of every underground worker in this Province.

We trust that this Commission will recommend that the coal operators be compelled to provide adequate wash house facilities for the coal mine workers of New Brunswick. In at least one instance, the working force was charged a fee for the use of a wash house, which is a practice that is entirely foreign to the coal industry of Eastern Canada. Other wash houses in the New Brunswick coal area are in a deplorable condition, which endangers the health and welfare of the mine workers and their families. Scientific regulations have been established by the Coal Mining Division of the International Labour Office, with particular regard to the space required per man, adequate heat and water, and cleanliness, and we expect these conditions to be recognized in this Province.

In conclusion the United Mine Workers of America of District No. 26 wish to thank the Commissioner for his invitation to express the opinions of the Union, and we trust that our submission will receive your utmost consideration.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of
DISTRICT NO. 26, U. M. W. OF A.

William H. Marsh
.....
PRESIDENT

Stephen Le Chanté
.....
VICE-PRESIDENT

Michael Higgins
.....
SECRETARY-TREASURER

